Stockings for Cleaning.

OLD, worn-out black stockings are most excellent for cleaning dark garments because no white fuzz is left on the dark fabric after the cleansing fluid is applied, as is often the case when a white cloth is used.

Her Unwelcome Husband By W. L. George

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was in love with him; he was to propose to her and marry her. Nothing very complicated there, but he was troubled by very confused emotions.

Now, as he sat in an armchair chewing a pipestem, he did not tell himself that he still loved Claire Caldecot, but he did not tell himself that he did not love her; he knew that Patricia drew him with a force that was irresistible, but yet he did not want to go to her yet and make all clear. He did love Patricia, he had known that for several days.

Also he knew that often, during the last year or two, in spite of her beauty, of her intelligence, something had seemed lacking in Mrs. Caldecot. She had a way of being tolerant to him which annoyed him; she had too many memories, had met too many people. Also they had experienced so much together, talked so much; he had no new stories for her, and she—oh, he hated to think of it—he knew too well the way she did things, the angle of her head as she wrote a note, just the smile she would give as she turned her head when he called her, just the way in which she slowly closed her eyes when he kissed her, and exactly the scent, the form of her lips.

As he thought of this a piteous sense of desolation came over him. He'd lost all those dear, intimate things. He forgot how stale they had grown and he wanted them again; from the depth of his being rose the lover's eternal appeal that old delights be made new and thrills eternal. He was very unhappy and he did not know what to do.

Then he looked up and down his room, for he saw quite well what he ought to do, and that was why he did not want to do it. Propose to Patricia! He rather wanted to just then. It was not only that her prettiness, her innocence attracted him; but here was somebody who was not stale, somebody who would surprise him by her gestures, her responses; it was also that here was something definite to do. If he engaged himself to Patricia he felt that he would become free from his new sense of forlornness. It was as if he couldn't be without a woman.

He reviewed Patricia; he recreated in his mind the small, round head with the curly hair, the parted pink lips and the delicate shape. She was very moving, and at that moment he wanted her. It would be adorable. She was the girl he wanted to end his life with; she would be such a little thing to protect and look after. That was very attractive after the breadth, the strength of Mrs. Caldecot's personality.

But he did not want to go downstairs, since Patricia, who looked so upset, would probably be in her bedroom. He wasn't going to own up to himself that the most powerful of the influences that were holding him back was that he would probably have asked Patricia to be his wife if there had been no Mrs. Caldecot. What troubled him was not Mrs. Caldecot's claim, since she had resigned it, but the fact that she told him to go to Patricia—that she had, in a way, handed him over.

He confessed this to himself after a few minutes, perhaps not quite so clearly as that. He put it to himself that he wasn't going to rush into this.

The more Rodbourne thought about this, the more he disliked Patricia. He began to tell himself that, after all, he wasn't so sure as all that; he even tried to outrage his consciousness of love by using to himself the words "gone on her." He was afraid. He was trying to reduce the intensity of his attraction because he wanted to resist it, but did not know why he wanted to resist it. Perhaps because he wanted to succumb to it. He would succumb, no doubt, because he wanted to resist, in a sort of reaction.

This complicated emotion led Rodbourne to follow an entirely different idea. It was very pleasing to have an idea of his own, and it was this: He was awfully hurt by the way Claire had behaved. He knew quite well that she had every reason to get mad when she caught him kissing Patricia, but that wasn't reason to make an end of something that had been going on for eight years, just like that, in five minutes. It wasn't fair. That sort of thing wasn't done. He didn't want to be hard on Claire, so he wouldn't bring it up again, but he was hurt. He wouldn't have thought she'd have behaved like that.

It did not then strike Rodbourne that anything might be his fault, for he was entirely masculine; the more he meditated the more he saw himself as injured and misunderstood by both women. By degrees this transmuted itself into a sense of his own nobility. It was a pity to be misunderstood, but in such a world it was to be expected.

By the time these meditations came to an end Rodbourne had attained a rather satisfied state of mind. There ran through it some forlornness, but it was mainly excitement. He did not then think that his parting with Mrs. Caldecot was final, but he wasn't going to do anything. If she made the first move he'd be decent about it. Why, he was very fond of her, and after a scene like that they might call quits. He was rather misty as to his future with Mrs. Caldecot, combined with stimulating experiences. And Patricia muddled things somehow, but Rodbourne's main attitude was that henceforth he wasn't going to stand much from anybody.

After a melancholy lunch, where, to his embarrassment, both Patricia and Mrs. Caldecot appeared, both calm, perfectly polite, but rather silent and looking so ill that it was almost rude, he felt so uncomfortable that he went out immediately after lunch.

Really, this was a bit too thick. They looked like a pair of ghosts, and Mrs. Headcorn noticed nothing at all, the great, fat porpoise. Jolly good thing he was going next day; he couldn't stand much more of this sort of thing. Soon after, he left the house under a rain which decrepitated on his mackintosh; he continued to tell himself that this sort of thing was a shame. A profound conviction of the well-bred Englishman matured in him; these women really ought to keep up appearances.

But the walk was very long and very wet. He drank abominable tea and ate bread and margarine in a public-house. He discovered what he had suspected—that his right foot was very wet because there was a hole in the sole. On the way back bits of grit got through the hole and hurt him. As it was growing dark he was not sure of his way; he was directed to a short cut by a well-meaning laborer, who apparently did not know the difference between his right and his left hand.

Finally Rodbourne arrived at Cantrel Court at half-past six, drenched, miserable, inclined to think that the world was a rotten place. Everybody had a rotten time. He included in this Mrs. Caldecot, who had preoccupied him more than Patricia, presumably because the walk was so wet that it disposed him to sorrow, rather than to the febrile expectation represented by Patricia. So, because he was so wet, he changed at once, and after a hesitation came downstairs half an hour before dinner.

Contentedly he sat down by the fire with the lunch edition of a London evening paper. He felt very comfortable in dry clothes. Also there was a queer bit of news about a split in the opposition. He didn't believe it, but this thing was coming up again and again. He decided to ring up next day a certain journalist who was supposed to know about these things. It was then that Mrs. Caldecot came into the drawing room.

She had spent all the afternoon alternating between a mood of despair, which bade her go and lie down on her bed and stay there, and a mood of courage, when she talked to Mrs. Headcorn, and even to Patricia. Perhaps she didn't like her as much as she had done before; she was less aware of the girl's charm and of her prettiness; indeed, she found it difficult to discover what Bob saw in the child until she told herself with a smile that one seldom understood why lovers should select each other.

No, she didn't like her, but she didn't dislike her. Patricia had become to her a sort of natural fact which leaves one neutral. Bob loved this girl. Well, there was nothing more to say about it; he did. Mrs. Caldecot's emotions had by that time grown a little vague. She was no longer capable of feeling very intensely; some time would have to elapse before the strained chords of her emotions could again be made to vibrate. Besides, Patricia helped because she did not have the drilled courage of the older woman; she went upstairs, and did not come down again until nearly dinner time, pleading a headache. Mrs. Headcorn said she must on no account be disturbed, but went up with remedies three times in four hours, and once with tea.

It was probably the mood of courage which brought Mrs. Caldecot down so early. As she dressed she shrank from the idea that once again she must meet Bob, try to be pleasant, try to be easy. Again she was tempted to miss dinner, but she told herself that it wasn't fair to May. Patricia seemed so upset; perhaps she wouldn't come down, and it would be rather hard on May if two of her visitors abstained, for she was giving a little dinner that evening and two people were coming in. "No," thought Mrs. Caldecot, "it won't do. I've got to play the game." To demonstrate to herself that she was not going to shirk, Mrs. Caldecot was ready at twenty to eight. Finding Rodbourne in the armchair by the fire, she did not perceptibly hesitate, but went straight up to the hearth and sat down, asking him evenly if there was any news.

"Nothing much," said Rodbourne awkwardly.

Mrs. Caldecot hesitated. She wanted to be normal, but this was very difficult. So she pressed him: "No gossip?"

"Oh, the usual sort of thing," he replied ungraciously as he realized her effort. "They say Chale is going to resign, but as you know they've been saying that for the last three months."

"Yes," said Mrs. Caldecot, "but it might be true this time. And you know, it's just possible that it might be worth your while."

"My dear Claire," replied Rodbourne in the cool tone which he employed to her when she did not agree with him, "you know quite well that Chale is only playing for the Cabinet, and if I run myself into the Harbor Office I'll get stuck there until the next general election, and who's to know what'll happen in the mix up? I might lose my seat."

"Oh, don't be so silly, Bob," said Mrs. Caldecot, for a moment forgetting what had happened and resuming her old role. "I know it was I prevented you taking the Under Secretaryship before, but times have changed. You know quite well that only a week ago Fitzwater Ingham told Arabella, who told me"——

"And you told me," said Rodbourne savagely, "and told me every day that if only I'd be a dummy for a few months they'd give me a sugar stick like a nice little boy."

"No," said Mrs. Caldecot with an air of superiority, "you only have to be a dummy until Doon takes a peerage."

"He won't."

"My dear boy, he will."

"What makes you think so?"

"The Liberal candidate in his division is retiring. So all the malcontents will vote Labor, just to get Doon out, and Doon will go down. He knows what is coming as well as we do; so he'll take a peerage to avoid it."

"Oh," said Rodbourne thoughtfully, "there might be something in that." Then, as always in such discussions, he smiled and said, "You're not so useless after all."

Mrs. Caldecot did not reply, for this brought her back to the world of the day, so different from the world of the day before. She wanted to say, "What's the use? I can't help you now." But it was so dreadful and she did not want her voice to tremble. So Rodbourne went on looking at her, disturbed now as her silence recalled to him the new situation. He felt clumsy; besides, now that she sat before him under the rose-shaded light, she looked different. Very beautiful. He did not know what pains she had taken over herself during the last half hour; he did not realize that she had expended artifice on the rose of her cheeks, on the ordering of her hair, on bringing out with a touch of blue the mellow fullness of he, eyelids, which now, like faintly crumpled crepe de chine, made two mauve zones of flesh, upon whose moist and scented warmth he wanted to press his lips.

Still she did not speak; still sat, firm hands negligent upon her lap. Her quietness exasperated him into activity. As he bent forward he murmured hoarsely, "Claire, don't let's be fools. Let's wash out this morning."

She did not reply; she could not, for she was horribly tempted to hold on to this interest as well as to this old love. So again he pleaded: "I know I offended you, but the girl means nothing to me. It's you only you. Won't you?" and, putting out a hesitating hand, he took hers.

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